

Middle School Grading Practices Guidelines



CONESTOGA VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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INTRODUCTION

The unique developmental characteristics – physical, social/emotional, intellectual – of students between the ages of ten and fifteen years separate them from younger children and older adolescents. This is an age group unlike any other that requires the commitment and dedication of knowledgeable educators who understand the uniqueness of the middle level student and are able to respond positively to these rapidly moving and changing learners in transition from childhood to adolescence.

The middle school concept has been developed as a means of responding to the nature and needs of this age group in a way that addresses individual needs, promotes a love of learning, and encourages a life-long pursuit of knowledge. This focus on the child also extends to grading practices that require congruence with the development of the middle level child and avoidance of practices that undermine developmentally appropriate instruction.

In developmentally responsive middle schools, assessment, grading, and reporting practices reflect the unique characteristics of the middle level child and promote learning and success. The bottom line is not just test scores and grades, but the development of decent, responsible, ever-learning young people (This We Believe, 2001, p.87).

To promote these beliefs, and to create consistent grading practices, to assess present middle school grading practices, to review the research on best practice grading methods, and to make recommendations for the use of effective grading strategies for the middle level. This committee recognizes that a grade is a symbol that summarizes a student's performance over a period of time and is used as the primary shorthand tool for communicating with parents on how their children are faring (Olson, 1995, p.24).

In addition to sharing grading information with parents, clear communication of student progress and achievement is also important:

- to students, so they can understand how their learning is progressing;
- to teachers, so they can plan instruction to meet the needs of individual students;
- to administrators, so they can provide the necessary supports to improve the learning process; and
- to others in the educational system who help ensure success for all students.

Following are grading practices guidelines that research has shown to be important for student success. These guidelines are designed to create a consistent system for determining and communicating academic progress of students. If these grading practices guidelines are implemented consistently by all staff members, it is believed that the result will be enhanced student learning, improved academic performance, greater student success, and more effective communication with all stakeholders.

MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADING PRACTICES GUIDELINES

Source of the Grade: Since grades are a representation of how well the student understands what a teacher expects him/her to know and be able to do, grades shall rely mostly on summative assessments that measure the student's achievement of the learning goals. Grading practices shall then be related directly to stated learning goals (district/department and state standards) and provide an accurate reflection of a student's academic performance.

A student's grade may be based on a combination of summative and formative assignments whereby summative assignments should account for at least 85% of the grade and formative assignments may account for no more than 15% of the grade. Students should be informed as to which category the assignment falls at the time it is assigned.

Formative Assessments: Formative assessments are used to inform the success of instruction and can play a part of the student's grades. Formative assessments are designed to help the students and teachers identify areas needing improvement. Grades help the student understand what is needed to reach proficiency. They also help the teacher determine student progress toward achieving the stated goals (district/department and state standards) and provide assistance with identifying instructional needs and planning instructional strategies. Homework assignments may be formative or summative.

Summative Assessments: Summative assessments evaluate the extent to which a student has achieved knowledge of the stated goals (district/department and state standards). These typically occur at the conclusion of a period of instruction or when a teacher has completed instruction related to the stated goals. Students will be notified prior to all summative assessments.

Departments will implement common assessments such as: benchmarks, unit assessments, district assessments, final exams, etc. Selection and development of assessments will occur at the department level.

Teachers should share with students, verbally and in writing, what it is they are expected to know and be able to do at the conclusion of a specific unit of study. These stated learning goals (district/department and state academic standards) should come directly from the planned course upon which all instruction and assessment should be based. Consider providing an opportunity for reassessing after remediation has occurred.

Source of the Grade - Application:

- *Grades are a reflection of what the student is able to know and do as a result of participation in an educational experience.*
- *Grades can be a combination of Summative (no less than 85%) and Formative (up to 15%) assignments/assessments.*
- *Common assessments should be used by department to ensure a common experience and common data collection.*
- *Students need to know what is expected of them.*
- *Consider reassessing students after remediation.*

Effort & Participation: Reporting student behavior is important and necessary. Teachers will report student Work Habits on the report card by utilizing the following scale: O – Outstanding; S – Satisfactory; N – Needs Improvement; or U – Unsatisfactory. Teachers will use a department-approved rubric to determine work habits.

Quantifiable behaviors evaluated on a rubric to calculate effort and participating are acceptable source of grades. Turning in lab fees, signed forms, etc. are not appropriate sources for grades. However, these behaviors shall be reported separately in the comments or Work Habits section of the report card.

Teachers are encouraged to provide comments on the report card. Students with a failing grade must have comments provided by the teacher on the report card indicating the cause of that failing grade.

Extra Credit: It is left to the teacher's discretion whether to offer extra credit. All extra credit must, however, be academically based and assess knowledge and/or skills. A student will be permitted to earn no more than two percentage points to boost a grade.

Effort & Participation - Application:

- *Teachers must use the Work Habits score and encouraged to use comments on the report card to communicate student behavior, unless the student is failing then the comments are required.*
- *Grades must be based on quantifiable sources.*
- *A student will be permitted to earn no more than two percentage points to boost a grade.*

Late & Missing Work: Teachers may set due dates for graded assignments that will be part of the student's grade, and they may exempt students from penalties. Since assignments are drawn from the district curriculum (district/department and state academic standards), it is important for all students to know the information from the assignment. As a result, students will be expected to complete all required assignments.

Late Work: If assignments do not meet the set due date (barring absences), the student's grade for that assignment may be reduced 10% (per school day) off the earned score.

Missing Work (Absent): Scholastic work missed as a result of excused absence, for disciplinary reasons or for unexcused absence of less than 4 days may be made up according to the following guidelines: For every day a student is absent (not to exceed five consecutive days), he or she will be allowed two days to make-up missed work. Any student missing more than five consecutive days must request work to be sent home through the assistant principal's office. Work missed because of approved educational trips may be made up regardless of length of absence.

Missing Work (Incomplete): Students are expected to complete all required work. In the electronic grade book, "I" will be used to represent incomplete work. In order to avoid inflated/misleading grades throughout a grading period, "I" will be calculated as a zero

until the “I” is updated. Incompletes must be changed if the student completes the work. Additionally, zeroes can only be assigned permanently after exhausting the time allotted for late and make-up work as outlined in this document (see Late Work above). After the trimester ends, incomplete assignments (“I” in the grade book) must be changed to “0” to calculate the student’s final grade.

Late & Missing Work - Application:

- *Teachers may set due dates.*
- *Students that turn in work past the due date may have 10% per school day removed from their score.*
- *Absent students have two days for every one day absent to make up the work without penalty.*
- *Students may make up any work from less than four unexcused absences.*
- *Incomplete assignments (barring absences) will be recorded in the electronic gradebook as an “I” which equals a zero until the assignment is completed or the allotted time for completion is exhausted. Incomplete assignments are subject to teacher/team procedures for the missing work.*
- *“I” must be converted to “0” to calculate the student’s final grade.*

Reporting Grades: Current grades will be posted on the district’s Sapphire Community Portal for Parents. Every two weeks, students without access to the Sapphire Community Portal for Parents and that are in danger of failing will receive a printed copy of their grades in each class (if requested by parent).

Parent Contact: Maintaining strong communication with the parents and/or guardians of our students is a key factor in their success. Therefore, if a student’s grade falls below a 65%, the teacher will communicate his/her concern with the student and directly to the parent/guardian by phone or email. The teacher will also communicate a list of these concerns with the guidance office and his/her direct supervisor by recording the parental contact in Sapphire’s Communication Manager. By communicating concerns early with the aforementioned people, the team can circumvent any issues before these issues result in the student’s failure of the course.

Report Card: Since the grade is a reflection of the student’s knowledge of the stated learning goals (district/department and state standards), student behaviors should be reported on the report card as a Work Habits grade. Comments on the report card can also indicate how a student is behaving. Teachers should provide comments on the report card. Students with a failing grade must have comment(s) provided on the report card indicating the cause of that failing grade.

50% Rule: A grade should not be an insurmountable obstacle for student success. For year-long courses the marking period grade for trimesters 1 and 2 should not be less than 50% and must be adjusted by the teacher if needed to meet the minimum requirement. The marking period grade for trimester 3 may be less than 50%. For trimester-long courses the marking period grade may be less than 50%. However, teachers may use the 50% minimum grade guideline applied to assignments at their discretion.

Grading Scale: A+=95-100; A= 90-94; B+=85-89; B=80-84; C+=75-79; C=70-74; D+=65-69; D=60-64; F=Below 60.

Electronic Gradebook Values: To facilitate clear communication of grades to parents with a multitude of teachers using the electronic gradebook and Sapphire Community Portal for Parents, it is best to have a standard set of values for scores as set in the preferences tab of the electronic gradebook. Please note: If teachers copy over their assignments from the previous electronic gradebooks, they need to make sure they update the due dates of all the assignments.

Medical (M): As noted, an Incomplete (I) as a final grade must be converted to a numeric/letter grade when the allotted time for completion is exhausted. Under the direction of the principal only, the teacher may assign a final grade of “M” to indicate a long term medical condition prevented the final grade calculation. The medical designation may remain indefinitely.

Teacher Preferences (*Must be set by the teacher under “Options”, “Preferences”*)

- “I” Incomplete = Zero - This can be changed if the student completes the work.
Note: All “I” must be changed to “0” two weeks after the end of the trimester to calculate student grades.
- “Blank Grades” = Excused – This would not impact the student’s grade and can be entered at any time.

Pre-Set in Gradebook

- “Abs” Absent = Excused – This would not impact the student’s score and can be entered when the student returns or become an “I” if incomplete.
- “Ex” Excused = Excused – The expectation is that this assignment will be ignored for grade calculations.

Noting Accommodations without an IEP: Students without an IEP may receive standard testing accommodations such as small group, extended time, reading text aloud to self or an adult, or sitting in a distraction free location without penalty. Accommodations provide students with alternative means of instruction or assessment based on individual needs but are not modifications to the curriculum. Accommodations will be documented and shared with professional staff via district or departmental guidelines.

Noting Modifications without an IEP: The classroom teacher, as part of an instructional team, will work with the Subject Area Supervisor to identify students and determine what types of modifications will be made in the course(s) in which they participate. Modifications alter the curriculum and without an IEP must be documented and communicated to the professional staff as well as the parents.

IEP & ELL: Use of teacher-developed accommodations/modifications, which promote student success, should be implemented in accordance with the student’s IEP. Likewise, grading ESL students should occur in conjunction with support from the ESL department;

the teachers will develop and implement accommodations/modifications which promote ELL student success.

Reporting Grades - Application:

- *Teachers will maintain their Sapphire Gradebook using building wide definitions for grades and lettered values such as “I”, “Abs”, etc.*
- *Teachers will make meaningful contact with parents if the student’s grade drops below a 65%.*
- *Work Habits and comments will be used to convey student behaviors observed in the classroom.*
- *For year-long courses, the marking period grade for trimester 1 and 2 must be adjusted to a minimum of 50% if needed. The marking period grade for trimester 3 may be less than 50%.*
- *Teachers of trimester long courses may apply the minimum 50% rule to assignments at their discretion.*
- *M = Medical may be assigned indefinitely as a final grade but only with principal permission.*
- *Document and communicate accommodations and modifications for non-IEP students.*
- *Implement the accommodations and modifications outlined in IEPs and advocated by the ESL department.*